Caribou Conservation Stewardship Program 2025-2026 Guidelines

Ontario

Contact Information

For questions regarding the Caribou Conservation Stewardship Program (CCSP) please contact:

The Caribou Conservation Stewardship Program Team

Email: borealcaribouconservation@ontario.ca

For questions or technical support with the online Transfer Payment Ontario platform, please contact:

Transfer Payment Ontario Client Care

Telephone: 1-855-216-3090

Email: TPONCC@ontario.ca

1.0 Caribou Conservation Stewardship Program (CCSP)

To conserve the province's rich biodiversity and promote environmental stewardship, the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks ("Ministry") has committed to funding stewardship projects that contribute to the maintenance or recovery of self-sustaining local Boreal Caribou populations.

As part of this commitment, Ontario is launching the next intake of the Caribou Conservation Stewardship Program (CCSP) to support projects that contribute to the stewardship and recovery of Ontario's caribou populations. The CCSP is part of the Species Conservation Program.

1.1 CCSP 2025-2026 Call for Applications

For the 2025-26 CCSP, the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks is accepting multi-year applications. All project activities must finish no later than February 15, 2027. Notifications to successful applicants are expected to go out in September 2025. Funds may not be used to cover costs incurred prior to the notification date.

1.2 Deadline

Applications must be submitted electronically through the Transfer Payment Ontario ("TPON") portal by 5 p.m. (ET) on Wednesday, August 6, 2025. Applications will be reviewed with the priority focus being projects that result in on-the-ground habitat restoration or protection.

2.0 Applying through Transfer Payment Ontario

All applications must be submitted electronically through TPON.

Applicants must have a TPON account in order to apply. If you do not have a TPON account, you must first create an account. Please sign

up early; it may take up to 5 business days to be granted access. Follow the detailed steps outlined at Ontario.ca/GetFunding.

Once you are registered and have access, the next step is to download and complete the application form (and supporting documents) through TPON.

You are welcome to submit multiple project applications; however, please ensure you create a new TPON case number and download a new application form for each project application you plan to submit.

If you have any questions or difficulties during this process, there are resources to assist at ontario.ca/GetFunding or you may contact the TPON Ontario Customer Service Line at 416-325-6691 or 1-855-216-3090, Monday to Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. (ET), or by email at TPONCC@Ontario.ca.

3.0 Program Objectives

The objective of the CCSP is to advance the maintenance, recovery, or adaptive management of self-sustaining local populations of Boreal Caribou, through supporting projects such as on-the-ground habitat restoration and protection and other conservation activities such as monitoring, science and research.

4.0 Background for Applicants

The Agreement for the Conservation of Caribou, Boreal Population in Ontario

In April 2022, the Province and Canada signed the Agreement for the Conservation of Caribou, Boreal Population in Ontario (the "Caribou Conservation Agreement" or "CCA"). The overarching goal of the Caribou Conservation Agreement is for Ontario, with support from Canada, to work collaboratively with Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners

to sustain or improve the environmental conditions necessary for recovery of Boreal Caribou at the Range-scale, informed by best available science. The CCA establishes collaborative commitments, including habitat planning, protection, and restoration activities from both the federal and provincial governments to protect and recover Boreal Caribou.

The Woodland Caribou Conservation Plan identifies the government's conservation goals for Boreal Caribou, as well as the actions the government intends to take to help conserve the species.

For further information, including the conservation plan for Boreal Caribou and annual reports related to the implementation of the Caribou Conservation Agreement, please refer to Ontario's Caribou (Boreal population) webpage.

5.0 Funding Guidelines

Applications will be considered complete if they include:

- a complete application form submitted through TPON
- performance measures and evaluations that are built into the project to assess the effectiveness of the activities. Performance measures must include one or more of the following:
  - » Area of habitat created, restored or enhanced,
  - » Number of threats addressed,
  - » Number of knowledge gaps addressed,
  - » Number of individuals engaged through outreach and consultation efforts (i.e. attendees at a workshop, website hits or social media interactions)

- a detailed project budget using the template provided
- a completed threats and knowledge gaps table
- a completed supplementary information table (if required)

Complete applications will be screened for eligibility (see section 6.0 for details) and eligible applications will then be evaluated (see section 8.0 below for details).

Whether or not to provide funding and who funding is provided to is within the sole discretion of the Ministry.

6.0 Eligibility

6.1 Eligible Applicants

Applicants must be legal entities, and can include the following:
- Academic institutions
- Corporations
- Indigenous communities/organizations
- Individuals
- Municipal and local governments
- Non-government organizations

Applicants must be in good standing with tax, labour and environmental laws.

6.2 Non-Eligible Applicants
- Provincial government ministries
- Federal government departments and agencies
- Unincorporated informal groups or clubs (non-legal entities)
- Conservation Authorities and their foundations

6.3 Eligible Projects:

Projects will be considered eligible if they:
1. Are designed to contribute to maintenance, recovery, or adaptive management of self-sustaining local populations of Boreal Caribou and,
2. Include activities that address one or more of the following categories:
   » Habitat management/restoration,
   » Conducting species surveys, inventories or monitoring
   » Direct threat mitigation,
   » Research,
   » Gathering, sharing, or incorporating Local and Traditional Ecological Knowledge.

6.4 Eligible Costs

The following expense categories are eligible for funding:
- **Staff:** includes wages and mandatory benefits for staff that will be directly involved in the implementation of the project. This includes wages for project managers directly involved in project implementation; project oversight/ supervision and accounting are excluded from eligible staff costs, but may be included under Support Services (see below).
   » **Important note for consultants and consulting companies:** If you are a consultant or consulting company applying for CCSP funding it is important that you itemize your project costs by the budget categories provided. Rates that include costs other than wages (for example, oversight, travel) must be broken-out and included in the relevant categories listed below rather than captured under staff. **Funding is to cover actual costs incurred by funding recipients, not a "fee" charged for services.**
- **Goods:** includes materials and supplies required for the project.
- **Services:** includes third party costs such as a contractor to excavate a

wetland or a design company to develop communication materials. Costs for some types of services may include reasonable disbursements in addition to fees if commonly charged for such services. However, funds may not be used for costs that would otherwise be ineligible or beyond reasonable limits set by the program (for example, travel and hospitality limits). This category may not include audit costs.

- **Consultants:** includes third party advice or expertise. Consultant costs may include reasonable disbursements in addition to fees if commonly charged for such consulting services. However, funds may not be used for costs that would otherwise be ineligible or beyond reasonable limits set by the program (for example, travel and hospitality limits). If you are a consultant or consulting company applying for CCSP funding, you must itemize your project costs by the budget categories provided. This category is only for third party advice or expertise.

- **Transportation:** may include transportation for meetings or events for project staff, contractors, or meeting/ event attendees. Funded amounts must align with the Ontario Government's [Travel, Meal and Hospitality Expenses Directive](). Funds requested for transportation of meeting attendees must be included in the application budget as its own line item. Transportation costs will be by the most practical and economical method.

- **Accommodation:** may include appropriate/ economical accommodations for meetings or events for project staff, contractors, or meeting/event attendees. Funds requested for accommodation of meeting attendees must be included in the application budget as its own line item.

- **Food and beverage:** may include costs for food or beverages for project staff

or contractors during project meetings/ events held with the public. Costs must be calculated according to the rates in the Ontario Government's [Travel, Meal and Hospitality Expenses Directive](). Collecting and retaining itemized receipts to verify the expenditure will be required. Funds requested under this budget category may not be used for: non-meal food and beverages; alcohol; meals when the travel period is less than 5 hours; or meals during travel when travel is a part of the regular job duties of the staff or contractor.

- **Hospitality-public meetings/events:** may include costs for food or beverages during project meetings/events held with the public. Costs must be calculated according to the rates in the Ontario Government's [Travel, Meal and Hospitality Expenses Directive](). If funds are being requested to pay for non-meal food and beverages (for example, coffee, water, snacks) during public project meetings or events, the amount cannot exceed $5 per day per person for a half-day public meeting/ event or $10 per day per person for a full day public meeting/event. Collecting and retaining itemized receipts to verify the expenditures will be required. Funds cannot be requested for alcohol.

- **Equipment/Rental:** the province may approve the purchase instead of the rental of equipment or capital items if: (i) the equipment or capital item is being used on multiple occasions throughout the project; (ii) total rental costs are greater than the one-time purchase cost; and (iii) without the project, it is unlikely that the recipient would purchase the equipment or capital item.

- **Administration expenses:** costs that are part of the normal operations of an applicant's organization, but which can be reasonably attributable to the project. Administration expenses are comprised of

disbursements such as postage/courier charges, photocopying charges, office supplies, and financial institution service fees incurred in carrying out the project. Funds may not be used for avoidable financial institution service fees (for example, non-sufficient fund charges). For clarity, administration expenses do not include items such as salary and wages, rent, travel, accommodation and meal expenses, computers, legal fees, audit fees, engineering fees, and other professional fees.

- **Indirect Costs of Research:** costs that are part of the normal operations of the Recipient, but which can be reasonably attributable to the Project.

- **Support services:** the time spent by staff in human resources, finance, information technology, and communications departments providing administrative support that can be reasonably attributable to the project. Project managers that have a key role in project implementation and key project participants are not included under support services. However, managers/positions that are solely involved in the oversight and planning of the project (such as principals, executive directors, academic supervisors) should be included under support services. Staffing costs where staff performs both administration and direct project delivery functions should be pro-rated accordingly. Pro-rating should be based on an estimate of staff time devoted to administrative ("support services" category) or project delivery ("staff" category) activity.

- **Honoraria:** meaning payments to Indigenous Elders or community knowledge holders for their attendance and participation at a meeting or event, are an eligible use of the Funds. The Elders or community knowledge holders may provide appropriate advice, guidance, information and insight based on their specialized knowledge of traditional ceremonies and/or the Indigenous community. Honoraria rates may be up to $250.00 for a partial day (3 hours or less) and up to $500.00 for a whole day (more than 3 hours). Honoraria are to be paid in addition to travel and meal expenses (if any) or compensation to Elders or Community Knowledge Holders for their time.

- **Requested funds for administration expenses, support services and indirect costs of research (combined) cannot exceed 20% of total funds requested from the CCSP, or $20,000/year, whichever is less.**

- **Audit Costs:** audited segmented financial information is required as part of the final report for transfer payments with a value of $750,000 and over. Up to $5,000 may be requested in the budget to fund this expense.

Note: Funding from the Ministry may be applied to the non-refundable portion of HST only. The Ministry will not cover any expenses beyond the approved funding amount.

7.0 Additional Information for Applicants

- Applicants should consult species experts and partners for advice in developing project applications.

- If proposing to work in a provincial park or conservation reserve, please contact Ontario Parks at PASCIENCE@ontario.ca.

- Projects or studies that are required by law are not eligible, including activities that are being undertaken to fulfill legal requirements or conditions identified in an *Endangered Species Act, 2007* (ESA) authorization or regulation.

- While provincial and federal governments may, in certain circumstances, be able to support projects through in-kind and financial contributions, they are not able to receive any direct funding from an approved CCSP project.
- Projects activities must be intended for the protection or recovery of caribou, and not result in the provision of good or services to the Government of Ontario.
- Applicants are responsible for obtaining landowner permission to access private property to undertake proposed activities.
- Successful applicants are strongly encouraged to submit species observation records and habitat information to the Natural Heritage Information Centre (NHIC).
- The Government of Ontario is not bound to act based on any findings that are produced during a project. Any results of a project are for the voluntary use of stewardship organizations only. The methods and results of a project will not necessarily be endorsed by the Ministry nor the Government of Ontario for use in future Boreal Caribou habitat identification or land use decisions.

8.0 Application Evaluation

Once applications are deemed complete, applications undergo a comprehensive, multi-staged assessment process. Applications are evaluated for the following:

- **Alignment with CCSP objectives**
  - » Overall, the proposed project must directly address the objective of the CCSP which is to advance the maintenance, recovery, or adaptive management of self-sustaining local populations of Boreal Caribou, through supporting projects such as on-the-ground habitat restoration and protection and other conservation activities such as monitoring, science and research.
- **Value of the project to species protection and recovery**
  - » Proposed activities address recovery actions as identified in the Woodland Caribou Conservation Plan.
  - » Activities will directly benefit Boreal Caribou and/or their habitat.
  - » Activities are relevant, fill a demonstrated need, and/or address an impending threat or knowledge gap.
  - » Project is part of, links to and/or complements a larger Boreal Caribou recovery or habitat protection initiative.
- **Project Design and Workplan**
  - » Work plan is detailed, clear and appropriate for the scope of work proposed.
  - » Objectives, design and methods are practical, appropriate, and scientifically sound.
  - » Project is feasible and has a high likelihood of success given the information provided.
  - » Project results and products will be made publicly available to further the protection and recovery of Boreal Caribou (e.g., published and promoted via website, peer reviewed journal, etc.)
  - » Performance measures and evaluations are built into the project to assess the effectiveness and impacts of the activities. For outreach and awareness activities there is a plan to measure changes to levels of awareness, behaviours and/or actions towards Boreal Caribou recovery.
- **Expertise, strong partnerships, and value for money**
  - » Numerous partners are engaged in and support the project in order to maximize available resources and knowledge.

- » There is a high likelihood for long-term benefits and continued work through established partnerships.
- » Applicant has proven experience, expertise and capacity (financial and operational) to complete the project.
- » Project budget is detailed and appropriate for the scope of work proposed.
- » Multi-year requests show how subsequent years build on previous years' progress.
- » Appropriate amount of matching funds/support from a variety of sources has been identified. A combination of both in-kind and financial support is encouraged, with financial being evaluated more favourably. Land values cannot be used as in-kind matching funds.
- **Application quality and additional considerations**
  - » Application avoids duplication of effort.
  - » Application is well written, easy to understand, and follows all instructions and criteria identified.
  - » Application outlines how proposed activities build on past work (if applicable). Projects will only be evaluated on information included in the application.

Whether or not to provide funding and who funding is provided to is within the sole discretion of the Ministry. In its final evaluation, the Ministry may also consider the kinds of projects proposed, the number of projects funded per organization, and types of organizations applying in order to support a variety of projects, and recipients across the province. The Ministry will not consider an application containing misrepresentations or any inaccurate or misleading information.

9.0 Notification

All applicants will be notified in writing of the outcome of their application. Following project approval, all applicants are required to enter into a transfer payment agreement with the Province before any payments will be made. Applicants should not proceed with a project on the expectation that it will be funded under the CCSP without notification of approval from the Ministry and a signed transfer payment agreement.

10.0 Agreement and Payment

Successful applicants will be required to enter into a transfer payment agreement before any funding will be provided.

The terms and conditions of the funding will be set out in detail in the transfer payment agreement. Generally, those terms and conditions will be consistent with the following:

- Payments will be made following the completion of milestones and Ministry approval of required project reporting. An initial payment may be available upon signing of the transfer payment agreement.
- Projects selected for funding will be required to submit reporting and financial documentation in accordance with the schedule outlined in their transfer payment agreement. Some projects may be required to submit audited segmented financial information.
- Applicants approved for funding will be required to submit certificates of insurance to confirm insurance coverage in accordance with the terms of the transfer payment agreement.
- Applicants approved for funding will be required to confirm that they are in good standing with tax, labour and environmental laws and may be required to provide proof in a form satisfactory to the Ministry.

11.0 Legal Authorizations

All applicants must review this section before applying.

Authorizations & Other Requirements

Applicants are responsible for identifying and obtaining any authorizations required for the project. Projects should not proceed without obtaining the required authorizations.

The following includes information on the ESA and other requirements that may be necessary for projects being funded. There may be additional authorizations needed depending on your project. These guidelines are designed to help develop your application as completely as possible. Note that authorizations (for example, permits) do not have to be in place in order to submit your application.

Disclaimer: Applicants must note that the following is for illustrative purposes only and does not constitute advice of any kind from the Ministry on how an applicant must comply with any requirements of law. Applicants must not rely on the following information as being a comprehensive list of authorizations or other requirements that may be required for their project and should consult with their own legal counsel or other relevant advisors in this regard.

Applicants should also note that the Ministry will not give preferential treatment for any authorization issued by the Ministry. The Ministry is under no obligation to issue authorizations and retains authority to refuse issuing authorizations if it is reasonable to do so, based on the information provided.

You may wish to contact the Species at Risk Branch of the Ministry at SARontario@ontario.ca for information on whether a permit or registration under the ESA may be required.

Early contact with the Species at Risk Branch during your project planning process may enable you to amend your project plan to avoid adverse impacts to species at risk and their habitats and allow you to determine the need for a permit or registration under the ESA. The Species at Risk Branch may be able to provide information on the following:

i. What conditional exemptions are available under Ontario Regulation 242/08;

ii. Whether an ESA 17 permit may be required and will need to be obtained before undertaking the funded activity; or,

iii. Whether your proposed activity may not require a permit or registration under the ESA.

All projects must avoid and/or minimize adverse effects to species at risk and their habitat. An ESA permit or registration is required for activities that kill or harm a species at risk, damage or destroy their habitat or otherwise contravene section 9 (species protection) or section 10 (habitat protection) of the Act. For greater detail, please refer to section 9 and section 10 of the ESA.

Activities not eligible for a conditional exemption and that impact species at risk could require an ESA permit. For more details, contact SARontario@ontario.ca.

If your project will be occurring in a provincial park or conservation reserve, you may require additional authorizations. You can apply for a research authorization online at Ontario Parks research, or if you have any questions about working in provincial parks and conservation reserves, please email PAScience@ontario.ca.

12.0 Recognition

The successful applicant will be required to acknowledge the receipt of financial assistance from the Government of Ontario.

13.0 Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy

Personal information provided on the 2025-26 CCSP application form is being collected by the Ministry to be used for the purposes of the proper administration of the CCSP, including to contact you for clarification or further information about your project proposal.

The collection use and disclosure of this information are governed by the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.*

14.0 Auditing

To ensure integrity in the use of public funds, the Province of Ontario reserves the right to require independent verification of reported information as required in the terms of the transfer payment agreement. The terms as set out in a transfer payment agreement must be satisfied to receive payments. The successful applicant shall provide, if requested by the Province, any necessary permissions to access the property where the project activities took place and make available any records, documents and/or information that may be required for this purpose.

15.0 Terms of Reference

The following provisions apply to this application process for CCSP:

i.   this application process is not intended to create a formal legally binding procurement process and shall not give rise to the legal rights or duties applied to a formal legally binding procurement process;

ii. the Ministry reserves the right to seek clarification, and supplementary information relating to the clarification, from applicants. The response received by the Ministry from an applicant shall form an integral part of the applicant's submission;

iii. at the conclusion of this process, selected applicants will be expected to enter into a transfer payment agreement with the Ministry (please see section 10.0 of the Guidelines for further information);

iv. neither party shall have the right to make claims against the other with respect to this application process, the selection of any applicant, the failure to be selected to enter into a transfer payment agreement, or the failure to honour applications prior to the execution of such an agreement;

v.   the Ministry may make public the names, addresses, telephone numbers, email addresses, website addresses, project description and funding amount, if applicable, of any or all applicants; and

vi. the Ministry will not consider an applicant whose application is found to contain misrepresentations.